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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 3422  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1190  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN 4909  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 9544  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1965  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 1943  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PE](#)  
SUBJECT: GOP EXPLORES CUBA ENGAGEMENT

REF: LIMA 870

Classified By: Amb. P Michael McKinley for reasons 1.b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: The GOP's approach to Cuba is reflected in President Garcia's rhetoric: critical of restrictions on freedom while acknowledging incipient reforms. In a sign that the GOP's approach could lead to a diplomatic thaw, Peruvian Health Minister Hernan Garrido Lecca recently traveled to Havana -- the first ministerial visit in years -- to sign several health-sector cooperation agreements. An MFA official with Cuba responsibilities told us the agreements would allow the GOP to assert control over positive Cuban activities while avoiding the baggage of Venezuelan middlemen. He said Foreign Minister Garcia Belaunde may visit Cuba in October. GOP policy toward Cuba remains ambivalent, with strong concerns remaining about political repression and Cuba's ties to what they see as the more directly destabilizing actions by Venezuela and Bolivia. End Summary.

#### Promoting Democracy Through Engagement

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¶2. (C) The GOP's approach to Cuba is reflected in President Garcia's rhetoric: critical of restrictions on freedom and violations of human rights while acknowledging that incipient reforms may be afoot. During the opening of the recent EU-LAC summit in Lima, Garcia publicly declared: "The only way for any country that has not joined the system of democratic freedoms and the world economy is to follow the path of elections, freedom of press, and freedom for those who suffer because of their ideas or positions." Government insiders told us this was intended as a clear allusion to Cuba and the absence of basic democratic freedoms there (ref A).

¶3. (C) Several weeks later, President Garcia, during an impromptu Q&A response, stated that even the Government of Cuba under Raul Castro had been forced to adapt to the inexorable challenges of globalization by adopting pay-for-performance rules for government civil servants. Referring to President Garcia's public remarks, MFA Director General for Mexico and Caribbean Gonzalo Zapater (protect) told poloffs that the GOP's main policy goal with respect to Cuba was to quietly encourage the incipient signs of democratic opening in that country. Zapater emphasized that it was too soon to tell whether these signs constituted a transition.

Health Minister Visits Cuba, Signs Aid Agreements

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¶4. (SBU) In acknowledgment of the possible transition, the GOP has begun tentatively unfreezing its diplomatic relations with Cuba. Zapater told us that there had been no official GOP visits to Cuba over the past several years, notwithstanding repeated GOC invitations. That had changed, however, with the mid-April travel to Havana, Cuba, of Health Minister (and ruling APRA-party insider) Hernan Garrido Lecca. In Cuba, Garrido Lecca signed several cooperation agreements to formalize Cuban medical support in Peru. Cuban assistance will principally go to a pilot program called "The Family's Doctor" ("El Medico de la Familia") to promote preventative health care in impoverished rural areas. (Garrido Lecca announced the program in late May, and said it is based on a model used in Cuba, Brazil, and England.) According to the agreement, the GOP will provide funds and Cuba will provide doctors and expertise. The Health Minister also signed an accord to set up a Cuban-run ophthalmology center in Cusco that Cuban press says will provide 80 cataract surgeries per day. A third agreement will allow a Cuban medical brigade that has helped Peruvians since the 2007 earthquake to remain permanently in the country. In total, 49 Cuban doctors and technicians will work in Peru to support these programs.

¶5. (C) APRA Party Congresswoman Luciana Leon told poloffs that Cuba is also helping Peru to fight illiteracy, which she described as President Garcia's top social priority. She said that the massive literacy program Pronama ("Programa Nacional de Movilizacion por la Alfabetizacion") is actually run by a Cuban, Angel Velasquez Fernandez, whom she believed worked for the Cuban government. MFA Director General for the Caribbean Gonzalo Zapater confirmed that Velasquez Fernandez is a Cuban married to a Peruvian, but did not know if he worked for the GOC.

#### Cutting out the Venezuelan Middle-Man

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¶6. (C) Zapater told poloffs that working directly and openly with Cuba would allow the GOP to assert control over positive Cuban activities while cutting out the Venezuelan middle-men and President Chavez's political baggage. He said the Cubans had demonstrated by their work in post-earthquake zone hospitals that they could provide excellent health care without overt propaganda or undermining the government. He told us the story of a well-to-do friend who had received free care and medicines at the Cuban hospital and seen no prosthetizing. "How could we refuse this assistance?" asked Zapater. That said, the GOP wants to monitor the Cuban presence and, through these agreements, will have access to the names, profiles, and locations of any Cuban health workers in Peru. Zapater added that the agreements with Cuba are "Health Ministry-to-Health Ministry" not "Government-to-Government".

¶7. (C) Zapater said that Foreign Minister Jose Garcia Belaunde may travel to Havana in October 2008 as a follow-on to Garrido Lecca's groundbreaking visit. FM Belaunde's principal goal in Cuba will be to determine whether Raul Castro's government is seeking genuine change and, if so, to support that process by expanding Peru's engagement incrementally, Zapater said.

#### Comment:

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¶8. (C) GOP policy toward Cuba remains ambivalent. While the romantic sympathies of some ruling APRA-party members for the Cuban "revolution" are latent, they have been diluted by two factors. First is the perceived betrayal by the Cuban regime during the 90s when Fidel cozied up to the then-government of President Fujimori and shunned the APRA (which was then part of the opposition). Next, and perhaps more importantly, President Garcia's clear-eyed approach to the challenges of globalization is anchored in an awareness of the damaging political and economic consequences of a closed system -- a system best embodied in Latin America by "revolutionary" Cuba.  
MCKINLEY